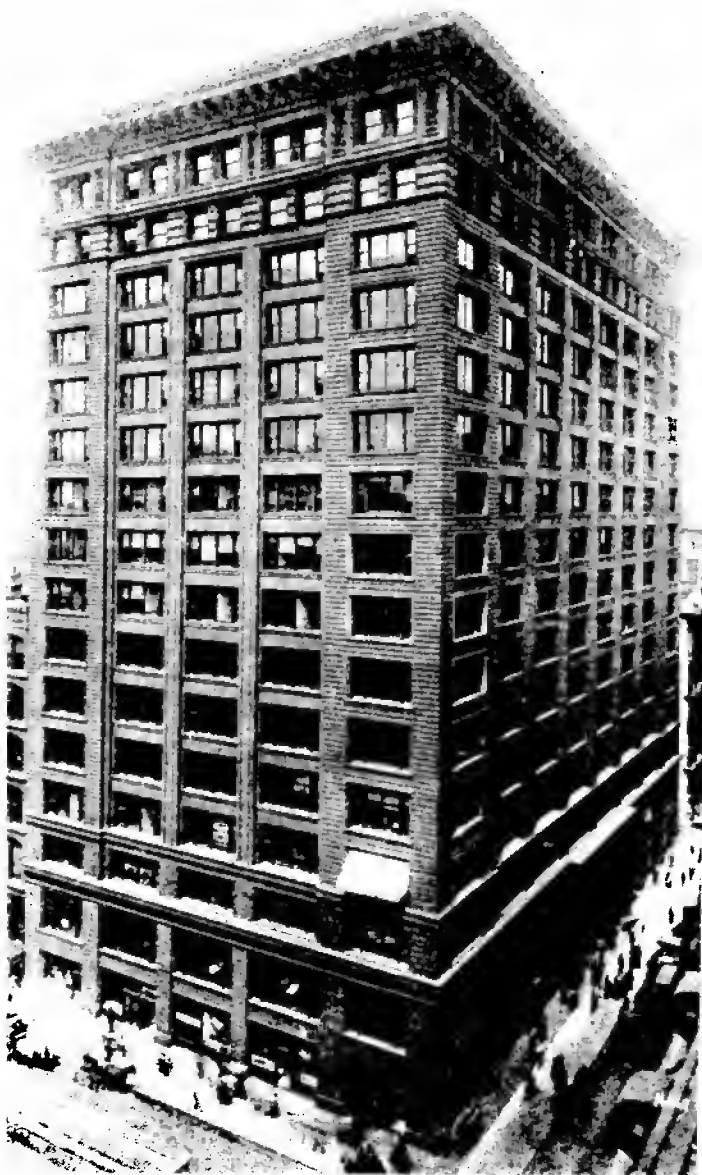


a summary of information on
the **marquette**
building

may 1973
commission on chicago
historical and
architectural landmarks



marquette building

140 south dearborn street

Holabird and Roche architects
1893

In an effort to attract new tenants after the Depression of the 1930s, the managers of the Marquette advertised their building as "The Office of the Future." The large, high-ceilinged suites, each with its own window, would provide contentment for employees, prestige for visiting clients, the managers claimed.

They were right, of course, but this was no revelation. The Marquette Building has been considered by both tenants and students of great architecture as futuristic since it opened in 1893-94.

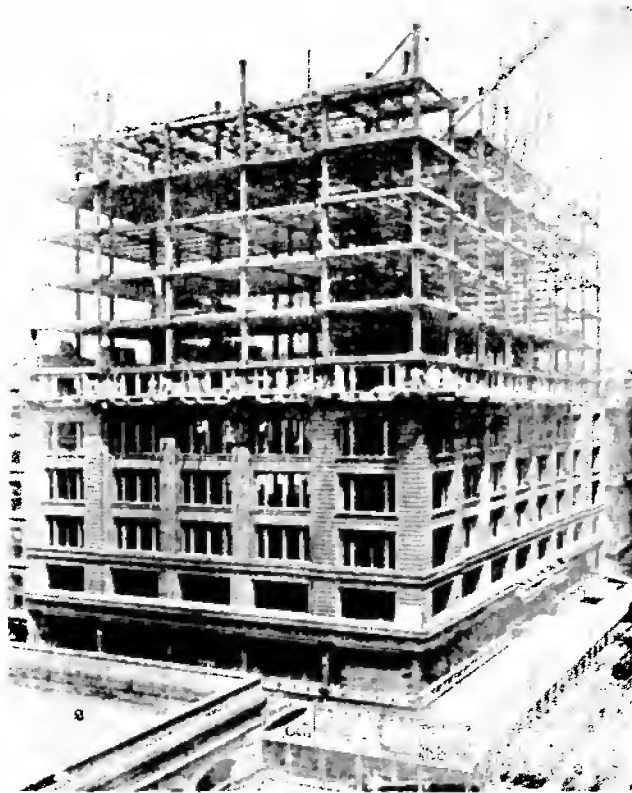
Prior to the late 19th century, commercial buildings were of masonry wall-bearing construction. Since the walls themselves carried a great portion of the building's weight, the surface displayed a tremendous amount of brick and little glass area. Around 1880 this building pattern was substantially altered by a style of architecture which has since become known as the Chicago School of Architecture. The Chicago School pioneered and used extensively a new structural technique, the steel frame. This frame, or skeletal construction, allowed

architects to build higher with more of the wall opened to glass than ever before.

But to incorporate a structural innovation and express it as an art form is a challenge rarely met. Here lies the strength of the Marquette. According to English critic, R. Furneaux Jordan: "Holabird and Roche, at an early date, have here recognized that a new form of structure—steel—needs a new form of architecture. The steel frame is fully proclaimed in the grid-like design."

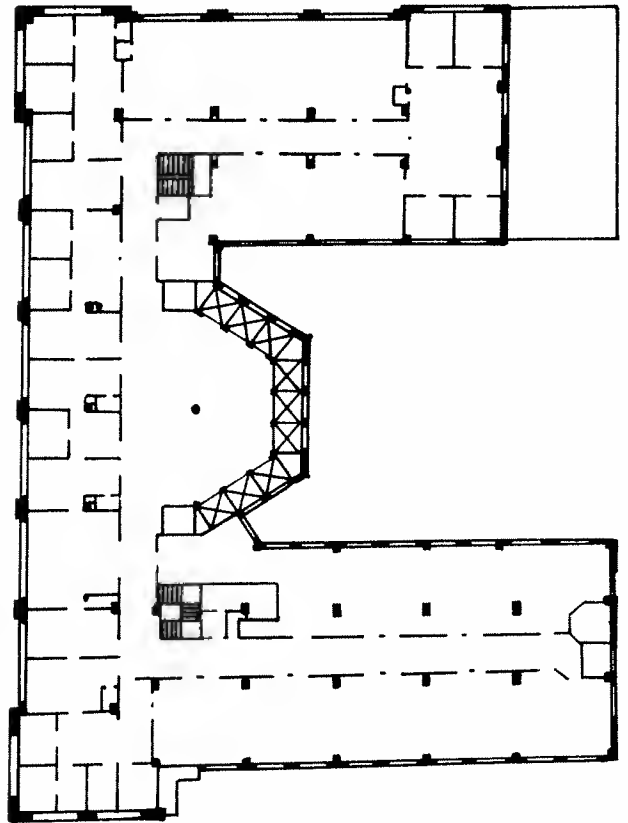
Earlier commissions by Holabird and Roche made considerable use of projecting bay windows. But in the Marquette, the architects dropped the vocabulary of the bay in favor of a flat, deceptively simple articulation of the interior steel frame. Carl Condit, authority on Chicago School buildings, contends that "the street elevations of the Marquette set it off from all its predecessors. The windows are long rectangular openings extending throughout the width of the bays. The general impression is that of a pattern of large transparent areas set in narrow frames of piers and spandrels. The wall is a nearly uniform array of rectangular cells vigorously expressing the steel cage they cover. The deep reveals and the unusually fine proportions give the Marquette an incisive and dynamic quality that raises it to the level of superior architecture in any style."

In plan the building is shaped much like a capital letter E. Offices fill what would be the vertical line and crossbars of the letter; the elevators occupy the short, central tongue. Because



Construction photo circa 1893-94. Compare lower to upper stories to illustrate that windows nearly fill entire structural bays and that finished elevation is a direct expression of the cellular steel frame.

(Courtesy of Holabird & Root and Landmarks Preservation Council)



Typical floor plan. The E configuration reads clearly. The addition is outlined at upper right.

the building embraces a light court finished with white enameled brick, all offices turn toward either the street or court and hence receive maximum exposure to natural light. Elevators were grouped in a spreading U, allotting unusually generous space to this essential service area.

A considerable part of the interior was built without par-

titions, then later subdivided to suit the needs of individual tenants. This provided tremendous flexibility not only for the original occupants, but for the variety of tenants who would use the building in future years.

The Marquette was sponsored by Peter Brooks with Owen Aldis acting as his representative. These same gentlemen commissioned several other famous Chicago buildings, including the Montauk, the Rookery and the Monadnock Block. It was Aldis who specified for the first time the eight basic principles of design and profitable management necessary for a first-class office structure. Because the Marquette adhered to these dictums so precisely, the building has enjoyed a history of full occupancy and utmost efficiency. In fact, those same principles have been followed with just slight modification to suit changing techniques and practices ever since. So not only did the Marquette pioneer the aesthetic development of modern architecture, it exerted a significant influence on the planned layout of the multi-storied commercial structure.

The building is carried on steel beam and concrete foundations. But during construction, a unique hydraulic apparatus was incorporated at the column bases of the west party wall to compensate for possible unequal settlement. Years later, when the Dearborn Street subway tunnel was dug in 1940, caissons to hardpan were installed under the east wall.

In 1905 a single bay, 16-story addition was built occupying the west 26 feet of the present Adams Street frontage. This addition employed the same materials, decorative motifs and general proportions as the original block. Although the extra bay upsets the symmetry, it is handled so sensitively that from close range it is difficult to distinguish the add-on.



This photo pictures the juncture of the original building (right) with the 1905 addition which is slightly recessed from the main building plane (left). Terra cotta ornament is characteristic of decoration found on the first three floors and at the top of the building.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)

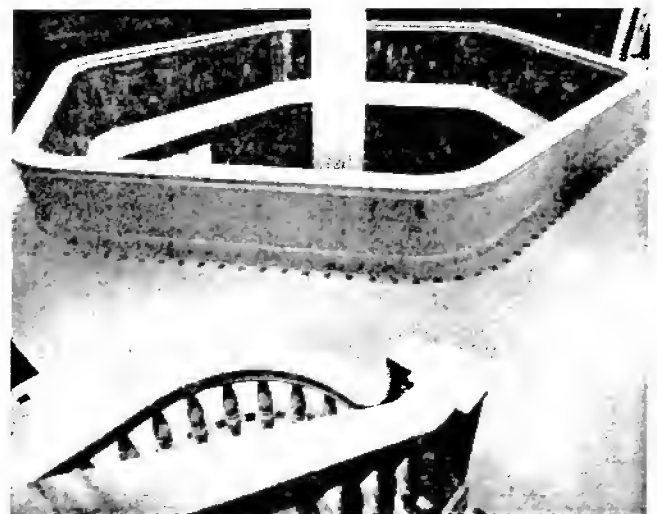
Surfaced in seal brown brick and terra cotta, the Marquette follows Louis Sullivan's base-shaft-capital organization. At the base, the first two stories are enlivened by terra cotta ornament sympathetic to the Marquette-Indian decorative device found inside. The 12 repetitive, intermediate floors are set off by the ornamental detail of the two topmost stories. The building was originally terminated with a simple yet decorative cornice which was removed around 1950 and replaced with a rather unsightly 17th floor. The main entrance, once more 3-dimensional with free-standing columns extended from the building plane, has also been remodeled.

The building has occasionally suffered criticism for its tripartite division and the heaviness of the end bays. At the time, however, the skyscraper was a relatively new invention, and it is conceivable that architect and client alike might not have realized fully the concept before them. Considering the Marquette's over-all contribution, such imperfections are minimal.

Famous in the history of architecture, the Marquette is not unknown to the art world. The June, 1897 issue of *Architectural Reviewer* remarked:

The main entrance doors are covered with plates of ornamental bronze, and the panther-heads on the push-plates of these doors were designed and executed by Edward Kemeys, the animal sculptor whose work at the World's Fair created so much favorable comment. Over the doors of the main entrance are panels of bronze, designed and executed by Mr. Herman A. MacNeil, illustrating incidents in the life of Pere Marquette...

...a grand memorial rotunda, which the owners of the building, with a desire to reduce the commercial appearance and increase the artistic effect of entrance, have devoted a large space in the center of the building to a series of decorative effects in marble, bronze, and glass mosaics of a high order. This rotunda is, I think, without parallel in its unique treatment...



Upper level of the Marquette lobby, richly embellished with marble, mosaics and sculpture.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)

On entering the rotunda, one instantly notices the large, fluted column of highly polished Carrara marble, which extends from the first-floor line to the second-story ceiling line, through the well-opening, where it supports the ceiling beams of marble...On both the right and left you notice the marble stairways...

Over each elevator door on the first and second floors are

portraits in bronze of noted Indian chiefs, together with the white men who were directly or indirectly connected with the discovery and exploration of the great Northwest ...These are all modeled by Mr. Edward Kemeys, with the exception of two —Marquette and Joliet— which are by Mr. A.A. Bradley of Boston.

The floors of the first and second stories are of a cream color field of ceramic mosaic, with border in design, composed of black and dark green tesserae.

Last but not least, I refer to the decoration forming the face of the balcony between the first and second story. In this memorial rotunda, which is considered the most artistic and interesting portion of the building, and which has been intentionally reserved as such, are arranged ...three pictorial tablets descriptive of the events in the life of Marquette and three trophy panels showing the armor and weapons of the period, and the heads of Marquette and Joliet, all executed in glass mosaic and mother-of-pearl, and surmounted by the marble hand-rail of the balcony.

These glass mosaic panels are certainly works of high artistic value...It is not the great size of these panels, but the bold treatment which has been given them, and the novel and most excellent introduction of new conditions heretofore unknown, that stamp them beyond all question the most interesting example of glass mosaic in this country. They greatly redound in the artistic ability of their producers [J.A. Holzer and the Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company] and to the good judgment of the people who were wise enough to employ this form of decoration for their memorial rotunda.

Owen Aldis actually translated Marquette's journal, named the building and suggested that the elaborate interior decoration immortalize the early explorers of the Mississippi.



The powerful face of the Marquette, grid-like and glassy, remains contemporary even when judged by today's severe standards.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)

J.L. Silsbee, the architect who gave Frank Lloyd Wright his first job, had an office on the 15th floor of the Marquette at one time. A section of the attic was specially fitted for artists' studios, and Grommes & Ullrich kept a stock of costly wines at a constant temperature in a large basement room.

Leading American and European experts readily admit that the Marquette is characteristic of the celebrated Chicago School, a distinctive masterpiece of world architecture.

In his monumental book *Space, Time and Architecture*, Sigfried Giedion enthusiastically refers to the Marquette as an outstanding example of the Chicago office building of the 1890s.

Carl Condit in *The Chicago School of Architecture* notes: "Holabird and Roche took the decisive step in the architectonic revelation of steel framing in the design of the Marquette...a striking integration of technical necessities with their aesthetic statement."

Nikolaus Pevsner, internationally respected critic of the modern movement, proclaims the building "Holabird and Roche's classic moment."

To the architectural historian, the building presents a powerful comparison between the earliest attempts at steel frame expression and the sophisticated refinement of that expression as seen in the new Federal Center just to the south. Only the slightest generation gap separates the 80 year old Marquette from its Miesian descendant. In terms of the urban environment, the new development actually depends on the Marquette to define the northern edge of its plaza, to block the flow of space and prevent leakage to the street. It could be argued that the scale of the Marquette performs this spacial function better than a building many stories taller.

The Marquette is truly a world famous and significant architectural achievement.

the architects

William Holabird, born in New York state in September of 1854, and Martin Roche, born in Cleveland in August of 1855, began their earliest architectural training in the Chicago office of William LeBaron Jenney. In 1881 they formed a three-man partnership with O.C. Simmonds, but changed the name to include only Holabird and Roche after Simmonds left to establish his own firm in 1883.

According to J. William Rudd, who compiled a bibliography of the firm, "Holabird and Roche soon found a place in the mainstream of the Chicago movement and by the end of the 1880s they were among the acknowledged leaders of the school. With such buildings as the Tacoma (1889), the Marquette (1895), the Cable (1899), the McClurg (1900) and the Republic (1905), they translated the avant-garde ideas of Chicago architecture into successful structures through[out] the nineties and into the twentieth century."

One of the city's most prolific offices, the firm enjoyed an unusually successful practice for 45 years. William Holabird was the more outgoing and worked as engineer and business partner. Martin Roche served as chief designer, although design responsibilities were often shared between the two until the number of their commissions forced the formation of a larger staff.

By the second decade of the 20th century their pioneering spirit shifted toward the Beaux-Arts design so popular throughout the nation following the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. While the buildings executed during this period lacked the firm's initial innovative style, they were nevertheless competent variations of the classical order.

To date, little has been written about the firm. Of those early reviews that do exist, most deal with the eclectic designs rather than the extremely original work produced in the late 80s,

the 90s and the earliest years of the 20th century.

This attitude is slowly changing, and rightly so. As historian Carl Condit states:

In the long period of their practice, in the number and excellence of their buildings, in the consistency and uniformity of their designs, William Holabird and Martin Roche most completely represented the purpose and the achievement of the mainstream of the Chicago School...

Holabird and Roche approached the problem of the commercial building in much the same objective, empirical, and businesslike way as Jenney did. Yet not only were they responsible for many structural and utilitarian innovations, but they also succeeded in developing the most effective architectonic expression of steel framing up to Sullivan's Carson Pirie Scott Store...

...They discovered the simplest utilitarian and structural solutions to the problems of the big urban office block, and out of these solutions they developed a perfectly rational and standardized form adaptable with minor variations to the conditions imposed by the commercial structure in a crowded urban area...

The uniformity of their work is so striking that with little familiarity one can pick out their designs all over the Loop and adjacent blocks. Some critics have complained that, after the Marquette (1895), their buildings reveal a monotonous repetition...The work of Holabird and Roche is not sterile repetition; it represents detailed variations within the achievement of a stable form.

This SUMMARY OF INFORMATION is a synopsis of various research materials related to the MARQUETTE BUILDING, prepared for the Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks by its Staff.



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cover photo: The Marquette as originally constructed, without the addition or remodeled Dearborn entrance. Note the large Chicago windows at the second story.